



Photo courtesy of Curt Mason

REVITALIZING DUFFIELDS DEPOT

Duffields Depot is located in the in a rural part of central Jefferson County, West Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. It has fallen into a dilapidated state, yet remains standing 177 years after its construction. Though it was only active from 1839 until 1883, the significance of this historic site to Jefferson County's transportation and military history is undisputed. Actions taken in the last decade may allow Duffields Depot to once again come alive by providing a service for locals, tourists, train enthusiasts, historians and more. Duffields Station Inc., a non-profit organizations formed as a grassroots organization in 2006 to preserve the site and has developed plans to turn the historic depot into a museum and visitors center. In 2007, Duffields was successfully added as a National Register property by two of the principles of Duffields Station Inc. and after a successful grant application, the roof was replaced over the stone section of the structure and some restorative measures were taken to the stonework as well. Unfortunately, the plans that were developed hit a wall in the execution phase when funding for the project hit a snag with the ban on earmarks in 2011 by Congress. Now the project must be completed as it was originally preserved, by a grassroots movement.

The historic significance of the site starts with the construction of the B&O Railroad. With the rail line reaching Harpers Ferry in 1836, subsequent projects developed to support the construction and development of the B&O. Between 1836 and 1842, the portion of the railroad between Harpers Ferry and Cumberland, Maryland on the upper Potomac River was under construction. During this early period, the B&O found it financially expedient, whenever and wherever possible, to use existing structures like inns and hotels as station-stops by mutual agreement with the owners, or to make contractual arrangements with adjacent landowners like Richard Duffield, for provision of suitable depot facilities for freight and passengers. It was during this time that the B&O paid Duffield \$2500 as compensation for the portion of his land used for the railroad's double-track right-of-way. With the money, Duffield constructed the extant stone-and-wood structure, which served as both a house for the B&O station master (the

stone portion), and as a storage depot for incoming and outgoing goods and commodities (the wooden portion, on the western end of the structure)ⁱ.

When completed in 1839 Duffields Depot was one of five station-stops located between Harpers Ferry and Martinsburg, Virginia (as it then was). Baltimore to Martinsburg was the first Division of the B&O, a hundred miles of travel on the line, which was then considered a day's work for a typical railroad operating crew of conductor, baggage porter, engineer and brakemanⁱⁱ.

From 1839 to 1883 Duffields Depot served local farmers and railroad passengers on a daily basis. Grain and other agricultural produce was shipped from Duffields, and goods and commodities were received and shipped at the station, along with passengers arriving and departing on the regularly-scheduled B&O trains along the B&O mainlineⁱⁱⁱ.

During the Civil War, the B&O was an essential lifeline of communication and shipment for the Union Army, for Washington, DC, and for the northern states in general. On October 14, 1864 the infamous "Greenback Raid" led by Colonel John Singleton Mosby's 43rd Virginia Battalion took place nearby. The Confederate raiders cut the B&O tracks just west of the Depot and when the train derailed they took 20 prisoners and 15 horses. Among the prisoners were two paymasters with over \$150,000 in government funds. Four months earlier, on June 29, Mosby attacked the actual depot and took fifty prisoners, including two lieutenants, before being forced to retreat by federal troops^{iv}. Throughout much of the Civil War, many Union regiments and detachments were stationed at and around Duffields Depot.

It is near impossible to estimate the number of people who were served by or involved with events at Duffields Depot during its nearly fifty years of activity. Recent studies in heritage tourism have shown that travel to historic sites, museums, battlefields, etc..., has grown substantially in the last decade. In Jefferson County, the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War brought more travelers to places like Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and neighboring Antietam National Battlefield in Maryland. Additionally non-NPS sites generated more interest as well. Examples include the B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore whose attendance has grown yearly. While statistics related to these specific sites aren't necessarily indicative of potential numbers of visitors to a Duffields Depot Museum, it does give an idea of just how many people have traveled to related sites to learn more. At Harpers Ferry alone, nearly 500,000 people a year visit^v.

Arming one's self with travel statistics and historic research on the relevance of the site are one thing, but bringing the project to a sustainable operation is another. Currently, Duffields Depot stands unattended despite local efforts to keep up the property. With overgrown invasive species, collapses of the eastern wooden end of the building, vandalism and littering taking place over the last several years, the project seems daunting. The fact remains that historic preservation and restoration projects often are accomplished brick by brick and they have to start somewhere. Great work has already been accomplished in saving the site. Now it's time to put in

the sweat equity needed to keep this plan alive. Projects that could be undertaken by the community could slowly bring the site back to life and showcase the potential of the site to donors, grantors and legislators. If nothing else, work done by volunteers could restore the sanctity of the site and provide a stage for development into an adaptive reuse for future generations.

The Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission has agreed that this site merits its attention in the upcoming year and will dedicate time from its volunteer staff to begin work at the site. Projects will include on-site cleanup, fundraising and potential acquisition of a small parcel that is critical to the potential public use of the site. Volunteers and donors will be needed! Consider joining this important project by contacting the JCHLC at HLCinfo@jeffersoncountywv.org or (304) 728-3228, ext. 1105.

ⁱ Restiano, John; Gentry, Anthony F. (February 2007). "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form:Duffields Depot" (PDF). National Park Service. Retrieved 18 February 2016.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Restiano, John; Gentry, Anthony F. (February 2007). "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form:Duffields Depot" (PDF). National Park Service. Retrieved 18 February 2016.

^{iv} Williamson, James J. Mosby's Rangers: A Record of the Operations of the Forty-Third Battalion Virginia Calvary. New York, NY: Ralph B. Kenyan, 1896.

^v "Harpers Ferry National Historical Park: Your Dollars At Work". National Park Service. Retrieved 18 February 2016.